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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4033
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1850
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1717
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2286
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2697

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: FAMILIES USE BRIBERY TO PROTECT
CONSCRIPTED SONS FROM HARSH CONDITIONS

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: In Turkmenistan, military conscription is highly unpopular. Treatment of conscripts is often very poor, and parents fear for their children's well-being and resent the "wasted time" spent in service. Families use bribery to keep sons closer to home and ensure choice duties during their compulsory military service. END SUMMARY.

CONSCRIPTS ARE OFTEN ABUSED

¶3. (SBU) Turkmen regulations require men with higher education degrees to serve in the military for eighteen months and all others to serve for two years. Soldiers are sent to every part of the country, and often have to endure extreme weather and terrible living conditions. Treatment of soldiers during their mandatory military service is traditionally very poor. Many parents express fear about the treatment their children receive, referencing hazing practices such as breaking or confiscating personal items like spectacles. One woman has photos that show her son with bruises on his lower back and on other parts of his body. Although the Ministry of Defense announced that agricultural skills would be integrated into some parts of military service, parents often feel that time spent in the military is wasted. They believe their children do not learn useful skills or perform valuable services.

MEN SOMETIMES TRY TO EVADE SERVICE

¶4. (SBU) For these reasons, many families go to great lengths to see that their sons avoid military service. Some men resort to using medical excuses or purported illnesses to escape military service. Medical conditions, such as sight problems, are exaggerated in order to be deemed "ineligible" for service. One source claimed that this harms future chances of employment, as medical documents follow individuals from job to job. At least two Embassy employees did not serve in the military, one due to sight-related reasons and one due to undisclosed "medical" problems, which he made clear were not particularly serious.

BRIBES USED TO "PROTECT" CONSCRIPTS

15. (SBU) Families look for ways to protect their conscript sons from harsh conditions, and paying bribes is the most common method. There are two levels of bribes. Families pay the first to the commissar board, which decides where a soldier serves. This bribe ensures that the soldier remains near his family. The second payment is monthly and typically goes to the unit commander. This payment ensures the better types of duties and that soldiers receive proper, home-cooked food. Reports indicate that some soldiers are even able to go home at night to visit their families. These fees reportedly range from \$100-\$200 a month, depending upon the desired services and locations. Since the average income in Turkmenistan is around \$200 per month, many families begin saving early to protect their sons. One woman with a school-age son said that she is already saving so that she can pay the monthly bribe.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Corruption is endemic in Turkmen society, and the military is no exception. The Ministry of Defense is taking some steps to modernize military institutions, but as long as service conditions remain poor, families will continue to view military service as something best avoided.
END COMMENT.
CURRAN